

VZCZCXRO5239  
PP RUEHROV  
DE RUEHNR #0565 0790942  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
P 200942Z MAR 09  
FM AMEMBASSY NAIROBI  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8899  
INFO RUCNIAD/IGAD COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
RUEHDR/AMEMBASSY DAR ES SALAAM PRIORITY 6433  
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 3141  
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS PRIORITY 3005  
RHMFIUU/CJTF HOA PRIORITY  
RUZEFAA/CDR USAFRICOM STUTTGART GE PRIORITY  
RUZEFAA/HQ USAFRICOM STUTTGART GE PRIORITY

UNCLAS NAIROBI 000565

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PREL](#) [ETRD](#) [EPET](#) [KE](#) [IR](#)

SUBJECT: KENYA'S FOREIGN MINISTER DEFENDS RECENT IRAN VISIT

REF: A. NAIROBI 553

[1](#)B. NAIROBI 342

[1](#)C. 08 NAIROBI 2137

[1](#)1. Summary: On March 9, post received a formal response from Foreign Minister Moses Wetangula to the Ambassador's February 24th letter expressing U.S. concerns about the visit of Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to Kenya. Ahmedinejad headed a large delegation for a two-day visit that was almost entirely focused on strengthening trade and economic ties. Wetangula defended the visit as an opportunity to discuss issues of international concern with Iran and reiterated Kenya's commitment to engage with Iran on issues of nuclear weapons and terrorism. Separately, the head of the MFA's Middle East Division stressed to Econoff Kenya's pragmatic, trade-centered approach to Iran and other Middle East trading partners. (More details on the visit reported in ref A.) Summary.

[1](#)2. On February 24, Ambassador Ranneberger sent a letter to Foreign Minister Wetangula expressing U.S. concerns at the visit of a high-level Iranian delegation led by President Ahmedinajad. During the two-day visit, the Kenyan government (GOK) focused almost entirely on promoting Iranian investment in Kenya (notably in construction and oil storage capacity) and simultaneously seeking to boost Kenyan exports of tea, coffee, and meat to Iran and beyond to Iran's central Asian trading partners. The GOK also sought (mostly unsuccessfully) to obtain concessional rates on Iranian oil imports. (Details of the visit and prospects for future economic cooperation between Iran and Kenya are reported septel.) This visit is one in a series of exchanges between Kenya and Iran, including reciprocal visits by their respective Ministers of Culture, as well as by lower-level trade missions. (See reftels.)

[1](#)3. In his March 9 response to the Ambassador, Wetangula described Ahmedinajad's visit as an opportunity to engage Iran on "issues of international concern," and noted that the GOK used the visit "to impress upon Iran its role and responsibilities as a key regional player in the Middle East peace process and the need to address the concerns of the international community on the alleged nuclear and terrorism threats." He added that Kenya, along with the rest of the international community, would continue to urge Iran to resolve issues that threaten global peace and security.

[1](#)4. In a separate post-visit conversation with Econoff, however, the Head of the Middle East Division at the MFA, Ken Vitisia, said that Kenya's focus for this visit was solely on trade and investment promotion. Vitisia noted that it is in Kenya's best interest to remain on friendly terms with both Israel and Kenya's trading partners in the Arab world (including Libya, the Gulf states, and Iran), and therefore said, in contrast to Wetangula's assertions, that Kenya

largely avoided raising issues such as the Israel-Palestine conflict, Gaza, and nuclear weapons with the Iranian delegation.

[15](#). Post will continue to track Kenya's growing relationship with Iran and will report accordingly.

RANNEBERGER